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Distance dependency in WTP for forest access

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While revealed preference studies on recreation has recently gained momentum in Denmark because of the advantage of not being subject to a hypothetical bias, stated preference studies have the advantage of allowing analysis of policies *ex ante*. The current study investigates willingness to accept access reduction in order to conserve wildlife – a policy which is only used little currently in Denmark. When valuing such policies we may face that people factor in the nature in their own area, even if we are targeting national policies. Therefore in the current study we investigate how distance to the closest forest and forest cover in the area where a respondent live, affect his/hers willingness to accept (WTA) a compensation for access reduction in favor of wildlife conservation. To do this we use a stated preference questionnaire, combined with GIS-data on forest cover. The access reductions are described as no access to 25% of the forests either during the summer or during the whole year. We hypothesize three competing reasons for differences in WTA: 1) Larger absolute loss; respondents living in an area with a lot of forest experience a larger per ha reduction in forest access if the policy is carried through, and the alternative 2) Diminishing marginal utility; respondents living in an area with a lot of forests will have a large (remaining) area to recreate in – even with implementation of the policy. Thus the effect of 1) will be overruled by diminishing marginal utility. Finally 3) spatial self-selection; respondents living in areas with a lot of forests and close to a forest value forest recreation more.

While the dominating effects of 1 and 2 can easily be separated (by opposite signs), 1 and 3 is more difficult. Different means is used to address this issue, including distance to nearest forest, and the size of neighboring forest cover. Regardless of which of the causes result in the larger WTA found for people in areas with more forest, results provide input to policy making into the spatial prioritization of where to reserve.